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SOME FIGURES OF SPEECH IN THE QUR'AN

Mustansir Mir

Viewing the Qur'an as more than a theological-legal text—in the present case, as a literary text—is not something entirely new in Qur'anic studies. An exegetical approach with a respectable pedigree examines the diction, figures of speech, and literary graces of the Qur'an. The approach received, early on, a fillip from the challenge posed by the Qur'an to its first addressees, the Arabs of Muhammad's time: if they thought that the Qur'an was not of divine origin, then they should try to match the excellence of the Qur'anic discourse, especially since they took such great pride in their ability to compose literary works—poetry, chiefly—of surpassing beauty. The Qur'anic challenge having remained unmet by the Arabs, Muslim theologians developed what is known as the doctrine of the inimitability (*i'jaz*) of the Qur'an.[1] The doctrine was formulated essentially in literary terms: the Qur'an, in respect of its language and style, is inimitable. The Qur'an's inimitability is the subject of not a few works in modern as well as in classical times.[2] But, their value notwithstanding, such works are constrained by the historically dominant style of exegesis, which suffers from what can only be called the tragic flaw of atomism. In atomistic exegesis, the verses of the Qur'an are studied individually, with scarcely any attempt made to examine such larger units of the Qur'an as the surahs (chapters),

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or even pericopes within surahs. To this atomism is held hostage, naturally, the literary study of the Qur'an *à la tradition*. Thus, authors of standard works containing treatments of rhetorical devices or elements found in the Qur'an—like Zarkashi and Suyuti —are often content to provide lists of instances illustrating figures of speech found in the Qur'an, showing little interest in offering a sustained analytical treatment of those instances, and certainly making no attempt to raise any general theoretical issues.[3] Under the direct or indirect impact of Western literary approaches—which include approaches to the Bible—the literary aspect of the Qur'an has begun to receive attention in its own right, and this development, to be welcomed in its own right, suggests the need for reorienting, or at least adding new dimensions to, the literary study of the Qur'an.

In the first place, it is necessary to recognize the independent status of the literary study of the Qur'an. In the final analysis, of course, the literary and theological aspects of the Qur'an, or of any scripture for that matter, are connected, and a thorough or detailed study of a scripture can ill afford to ignore the scripture's theology or doctrinal content. On the other hand, as I have explained elsewhere, there is no need to smother the literary study of a scripture under the weight of that scripture's theology (Mir, "Qur'an as Literature" 2-4). In the present context, in other words, it is necessary to break the link between the literary study of the Qur'an and the historical issue of the Qur'an's inimitability. Strictly speaking, the Qur'anic challenge, understood as a literary challenge, was addressed to the Arabs of Muhammad's time and would have little relevance to the post-Qur'anic generations, whether Arab or non-Arab and whether Muslim or non-Muslim. After all, the particular circumstances in which the challenge was thrown by the Qur'an no longer obtain. In the second place, a holistic rather than an atomistic approach is needed—or, rather, a holistic approach in addition to the atomistic approach is required. Literary study of the Qur'an at the level of the individual verse certainly has its uses—is, in fact, a necessary part of the exegetical exercise—but such study is not enough; it needs to be complemented by topical or thematic studies that would utilize the results of verse-level study but would aim chiefly at discovering larger literary patterns in the Qur'anic discourse, with the eventual aim of generating theoretical models of Qur'anic literary structures. This is where, drawing on Western literary studies, one can examine the subjects of, for example, irony, chiasmus, and personification in the Qur'an. The present paper is a modest attempt to approach the Qur'an from this point of view. Offered as a contribution to the growing field of literary study of the Qur'an, it looks at the Qur'anic use of selected figures of speech. The thrust of the paper is that the Qur'an employs figures of speech, just as it employs language

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in general, to achieve an effective presentation of its ideas, thoughts, and doctrines. The figures of speech to be looked at are, in order: asyndeton, polysyndeton, parallelism, chiasmus, envelope, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, syllepsis, and zeugma.[4]

Asyndeton and Polysyndeton

Asyndeton, or the omission of the conjunction "and" between two or more words or clauses, can be significant: the absence of the conjunction may indicate an absence of spatial distance or temporal delay, thus suggesting the existence of a close connection between the things or events in question. Julius Caesar's well-known *veni, vidi, vici* signifies that his arrival, observation, and conquest constituted three seamlessly connected parts of a single act. The pre-Islamic poet Imru' al-Qays praises the amazing agility of his horse by saying that it "charges, retreats, advances, backs up all at once" (*mikarrin mifarrin muqbilin mudbirin ma'an*) (Tibrizi 56).[5] The Qur'an uses asyndeton to underscore its doctrine. For instance, it frequently presents the divine attributes in sets of two or more, as in Qur'an (henceforth Q) 2.209 (and elsewhere), where God is described as "the Mighty, the Wise" (*'aziz hakim*).[6] The asyndeton implies that God possesses the two attributes of might and wisdom simultaneously: while He is all-powerful, He uses His power wisely, and, conversely, while He is possessed of wisdom, He is not incapable of putting His wise plans and decisions into effect (Islahi 1.342; 2.19-20). The figure also reinforces the Qur'anic critique of polytheism. Belief in the plurality of gods arises, the asyndeton suggests, because of an unwarranted division or distribution of divine attributes, such that one deity is viewed as possessing one attribute, another deity as possessing another attribute, and so on.[7] The same point is made in Q 59.24, which provides another instance of asyndeton: God alone is "the Creator, Remover of Blemishes, Designer" (*al-khaliqu l-bari'u l-musawwiru*). The omission of the conjunction "and" in this verse implies that God alone completes the act of creation in all its stages: He initiates creation (*al-khaliq*); He removes from what He has created any imperfections that may attach to it (*al-bari'*; cf. the sculptor's act of chiseling away excess matter); and, finally, He gives the being or thing created the design or form proper to it (*al-musawwir*). The asyndeton, thus, helps to stress that all three activities are carried out by the same God, who is the sole creator and, therefore, the only deity. The remarks made about verses like Q 2.209 and 59.24 would apply with greater force to those verses—e.g., Q 59.23 (Islahi 8.312)—in which many divine attributes occur asyndetonically.

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While asyndeton makes for compaction, *polysyndeton*, employing a series of conjunctions, aims at amplification and detail, and also at assigning independent significance to each item of a series, at the same time maintaining the broad unity of the series. The Qur'an uses polysyndeton to, among other things, string together a series of historical episodes relative to a particular group or nation. The figure thus serves as a unifying link between many incidents, which, though separate from each other in time or space, are united in respect of the purpose for which they are narrated or in respect of the point they all make. Take, for example, Q 2.40-67, which addresses the Israelites, using a long series of conjunctions:

> ...and fulfill My covenant...and believe in what I have revealed...and do not mix truth up with falsehood...and establish the prayer...and draw strength from perseverance and the prayer...and have fear of a day on which one soul will not serve as a substitute for another...and when We rescued you...and when We parted the sea, taking you along...and We made to Moses the promise of forty days...and when We gave Moses The Book...and when Moses said to his people...and when you said to Moses...and We covered you with the shadow of clouds...and when We said... and when Moses prayed for water...and when you said...and when We took your covenant...and when Moses said to his people....

This passage contains history, injunction, counsel, warning, exhortation, and reminder, but the repeated use of the conjunction "and" gives to all these various elements of the discourse the character of an integrated statement. In an ordinary reading of the passage, one tends not to notice the contribution of the simple and rather unremarkable conjunction "and" in bridging the time gaps that separate the various incidents narrated in the passage and in smoothing out the thematic bumps that would, absent the conjunction, seem to mark the passage. Rewriting the passage without the many occurrences of "and" would suddenly make one conscious of the importance of the role performed by the conjunction in knitting the passage together.

Parallelism and Chiasmus

Parallelism, or an arrangement of expressions with a structure like ABA'B', is aesthetically pleasing: by stating, first, A and B, then pairing A with A' and B with B', parallelism draws a kinetic scene—that of A leapfrogging B to join its counterpart, A', and B doing the same to be with its counterpart, B'. Chiasmus, or reverse parallelism—ABB'A'—too, involves leapfrogging, though this is performed on a larger scale, with A jumping across both B and B' to meet A', at the same time saving B the trouble to travel any distance

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to meet its partner, B'. The sudden coming together of B and B', in fact, adds a pleasant dramatic touch to the scheme. We will first look at a few examples of parallelism in the Qur'an.

Q 28.73 terms it God's mercy that "He has made for you the night and the day, so that you may rest in it [night] and seek His bounty [during the day]." Here each of the two elements in the first part of the verse—night (A) and day (B)—correspond to the two elements making up the second part—resting in the night (A') and earning a livelihood during the day (B').

In Q 20.118-19, Adam is told about his first home, the Garden of Eden:

> [118]In it you shall not become hungry and shall not become naked,
> [119]And you shall not become thirsty and shall not be exposed to heat.

Hunger and thirst go together, and so do nakedness and exposure. The structure of the verse, thus, is: hunger, nakedness, thirst, exposure, or ABA'B'. Q 92. 5-10 is a little more elaborate:

> [5]As for the one who gives [charity] and is God-fearing, [6]and bears out [the truth of the promised] good [reward], [7]We shall make it easy for him to take the easy path. [8]But as for the one who acts stingily and thinks that he has no need of anyone, [9]and gives the lie to the reward, [10]We shall make it easy for him to take the difficult path.

Several oppositions are set up here:

> [5]As for the one who gives [charity] (A)
> and is God-fearing (B)
> [6]and bears out [the truth of the promised] reward (C)
> [7]We shall make it easy for him to take the easy path (D)
> [8]But as for the one who acts stingily (A')
> and thinks that he has no need of anyone [and is, therefore, not God-fearing] (B')
> [9]and gives the lie to the reward (C')
> [10]We shall make it easy for him to take the difficult path (D')

Q 93.6-11, referring to certain aspects of Muhammad's life with a view to urging him to act in certain ways, establishes a deeper, causal link between the two parallel parts (verses 6-8 and 9-11):

> [6]Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter? (A)
> [7]And He found you lost and gave you guidance. (B)
> [8]And He found you poor and made you self-sufficient. (C)
> [9]So do not be harsh toward the orphan. (A')
> [10]And do not rebuke the one who asks [for guidance]. (B')
> [11]And as for the blessing of your Lord, proclaim it. (C')

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The argument runs as follows: Since God found you an orphan and sheltered you (verse 6: A), it falls to you to be kind to orphans (verse 9: A'); since God found you lost [the wordplay on "found" and "lost" is there in the Arabic also] and guided you (verse 7: B), you, too, must provide guidance to those who seek it (verse 10: B'); and since God gave you of His bounty (verse 8: C), you must proclaim His praises (verse 11: C').

Sometimes parallelism can take a subtle form, as in Q 6.141-42. Verse 141 speaks of two kinds of gardens, thatched (*ma'rushat*) and unthatched (*ghayr ma'rushat*). Verse 142 speaks of two kinds of animals: those which are used for purposes of riding and carrying goods and are relatively large—like camels and horses—called *hamulah*; and those which have other uses and are relatively small—like goats and sheep—called *farsh*. As will be noticed, the *ma'rushat*-gardens, raised high on thatches, are comparable to the taller *hamulah*-animals, whereas the *ghayr ma'rushat*-gardens, being closer to the ground, are comparable to the smaller *farsh*-animals (Islahi 3.186). The structure, thus, is A, B, A', B'.

Chiasmus in the Qur'an occurs in both simple and complex forms. An example of the first type is Q 40.58.

> The blind (A) and the sighted (B) are not the same,
> Nor are those who believe and do good deeds (B') and the evildoers (A').

Here, the relationship between the elements of the chiasmus (A, B, B', A') is obvious enough, and yet the chiasmus conveys a subtle emphasis: the very proximity of "those who believe and do good deeds" (B') to those possessed of sight (B) strengthens the case of the righteous while the very distance between "the blind" (A) and "the evildoers" (A') implies contempt and indifference, the speaker putting off mentioning again the evildoers, who have been called "the blind" earlier, until the end.

Q 3.106-7 makes reference to the fates of the good and the evil people on the Day of Judgment:

> [106]The day some faces will brighten up [A], but others will turn dark [B]. As for those whose faces will turn dark—"Did you disbelieve after having believed? Taste the punishment, then, on account of the act of disbelief you committed" [B']. [107]And as for those whose faces will brighten up, they shall be surrounded by God's mercy, they shall live in it [God's mercy] forever [A'].

Here, the chiasmus, by putting the idea of brightening up of faces at either end of the description and the idea of darkening of the faces in the middle, serves to highlight or accent the positive aspect of retribution (reward) and play down the negative aspect of it (punishment), offering indirect support

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to the Qur'anic idea of the predominance of God's mercy: "And My mercy extends over all things" (Q 7.156).

A relatively complex chiastic structure is found in Q 35.19-22:

[19]The blind and the sighted are not the same,
[20]nor are darkness and light,
[21]or the shade and the heat;
[22]And the living and the dead are not the same.

In this passage, verses 19-20 are a parallelism: the blind (A), the sighted (B), darkness (A'), light (B'), as are verses 20-21: darkness (A), light (B), shade (A'), heat (B'). The parallelism can be extended by putting "shade" and "heat" of verse 21, respectively, in the A and B categories, thus ABA'B'A"B". Verse 22 would now appear to be in chiastic relationship with the preceding verses. But, in verse 21, "shade" has been used in a positive sense (the shade that gives comfort), and "heat" in a negative sense (the heat that makes one uncomfortable). On this reading, "shade" falls in category B and "heat" in category A, and the elements of the four lines will now be designated as follows:

[19]The blind (A) and the sighted (B) are not the same
[20]nor are darkness (A') and light (B')
[21]nor the shade (B") and the heat (A")
[22]And the living (B"') and the dead (A"') are not the same

This gives the sequence ABA'B'B"A"B"'A"', which can be analyzed as follows:

ABA'B': parallelism
A'B'B"A": chiasmus
B"A"B"'A"': parallelism
ABA'B'B"A"B"'A"': a chiasmus (A'B'B"A") within a chiasmus (ABB"'A"')

In the story of Joseph in the twelfth surah, the plot is built on the principle of chiasmus, and I have shown elsewhere that the first half of the surah builds a series of tensions which are resolved in reverse order in the second half (Mir, "Qur'anic Story of Joseph").

Envelope

In *envelope*, the idea or the theme stated at the beginning of a discourse is reiterated at the end (*reditus ad propositum*). The reiteration emphasizes, or

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brings into relief, the idea or the theme in question. Furthermore, it signals that the material enclosed between the beginning and the end has some sort of thematic unity which calls for close study.[8] The obligatory prayer (*salah*) is the first and the most important of the rituals of Islam. In more than one place, the Qur'an uses the device of envelope to emphasize the importance of this ritual. Q 23.1-9 opens with these words: "The believers have achieved success—those who are fearful in their prayers." After recounting several other attributes of the believers, the passage ends with these words: "And those who guard their prayers" (Islahi 1.550; 5.299). Q 70.19-34 is very similar (Islahi 1.550-51; 8.576). Q 2.47-123 is an account of God's favors to Israel. The section opens with these verses (47-48):

> [47]Children of Israel, recall the blessing I gave you, and that I chose you over all other peoples. [48]And fear a day on which one soul shall be of no avail to another, no intercession on its behalf will be accepted, no ransom from it will be taken, and they shall not be helped.

And it ends with these verses (122-23):

> [122]Children of Israel, recall the blessing I gave you, and that I chose you over all other peoples. [123]And fear a day on which one soul shall be of no avail to another, no ransom from it will be taken, no intercession will avail it, and they shall not be helped.

As can be seen, with one or two minor variations—in wording or in sequence—the two sets of verses are identical and are intended to form a self-contained section, the first set signaling the beginning, and the second, the close of the section. The seventy-three verses in between recount, in short passages, a series of significant events in Israelite history, each event constituting one or another kind of blessing upon the Israelites. The events taken together span a long period of time, and they are all bound together by the theme of election and special favors.

Personification

Personification in the Qur'an is best understood with reference to the postulate that the entire cosmos has a stake both in the Qur'anic message and—since that message is addressed to humanity—in human destiny. Derived from the Qur'an itself, the postulate requires the making of the assumption that the phenomena of nature are possessed of some sort of sentience. Supporting such an assumption are verses like Q 17.44, which says: "The seven heavens and the earth and those in them glorify Him; and there is nothing except that it engages in glorification along with praise of Him, but you do not understand their glorification." Q 33.72, too, presents the heavens and

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the earth and the mountains as sentient entities: they were asked by God if they would bear "the Trust"—that is, if they would be willing to serve as God's vicegerents, taking credit for their success or blame for their failure in fulfilling the obligations associated with the position of vicegerency—but they balked at accepting the offer, man alone taking on the daunting challenge. But the Qur'an does not stop at attributing sentience to nature; it presents nature as a *muslim*, a "submitter." The attribute of *islam*, "submission," thus, becomes an attribute shared by man and nature, with the difference, underscored by theologians, that nature's submission to God is involuntary whereas man is supposed to submit to God voluntarily, nature's submission to God furthermore serving as a lesson and as a reminder to human beings to offer submission to God. But here we need to pause and note a difference, possibly a conflict, between the theological and literary points of view.

From a theological standpoint, nature has no choice but to submit to God, whereas human beings may or may not choose to submit to God. The Qur'anic attribution of sentience to nature, however, imparts to nature a certain personality that is missing in the theological perspective. In Qur'anic literary perspective, nature possesses a persona. In this perspective, too, nature is regarded as showing unremitting obedience to God, but nature's obedience to God now becomes the obedience of a living personality, constituting a much more powerful lesson and reminder to human beings to offer obedience to God. In this way, the personification of natural phenomena in the Qur'an turns nature into a repertoire of signs, examples, and arguments whose meaning and value are importable into the context of human life. There is no question that depiction of nature as having a persona lends greater immediacy to many of the Qur'anic passages dealing with nature.

We will note, and then comment on, a number of verses in which human qualities are attributed to natural phenomena:

> By the morning when it pants. (Q 81.18)
>
> He [God] said to it [the heavens] and the earth, "Submit, willingly or unwillingly." They said, "We submit willingly." (Q 41.11)
>
> If we had sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have seen it filled with fear, splitting up out of the fear of God. (Q 59.21)
>
> The heavens and the earth have become heavy with it [the Last Hour]; it will come upon you all of a sudden. (Q 7.187)
>
> The skies did not weep over them [Pharaoh and his people], nor did the earth. (Q 44.29)

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In each of these instances, personification serves a certain purpose. Q 81.18 describes the onset of morning. The Arabic verb used in the Qur'anic text for panting is *tanaffasa*, which suggests that the morning tries, as it were, to come out from under the heavy burden of the night and, in doing so, breathes effortfully. This, in turn, suggests that the day (and, by implication, the night as well) diligently follows the law God has laid down for it, for the morning, still fatigued from its "running" on the previous day, sets out on next day's journey without taking any rest—the day and the night, thus, constantly running a relay race, so to speak. The verse calls to mind Q 7.54, in which the night is pictured as pursuing the day earnestly (*hathithan*)—the implication being that the natural phenomena try their utmost to fulfill the commands of God. The message of a verse like Q 81.18, then, is that if this is how inanimate objects serve God, then human beings should be even more diligent in carrying out their obligation to serve God. Q 41.11 makes the same point: When God created the heavens and the earth, He commanded them to submit to Him, and they complied; human beings, endowed as they are with the gift of reflection, should be much readier to submit to God. The thrust of Q 59.21 is that the hearts of those who reject the truths enshrined in scripture must be harder than rock, for even mountains would break under scripture's impact (cf. the similar Q 2.74). Q 7.187 says that the heavens and the earth are pregnant with the Last Hour—are, in fact, in the final stage of their pregnancy and would deliver it any moment. The point of the verse is that the Day of Judgment is at hand, and that human beings must at all times be ready to face that day and give an accounting of their deeds before God. Q 44.29 implies that the whole universe is interested in the outcome of the moral struggle between good and evil, or between the righteous and the unrighteous, that takes place on earth: the destruction of Pharaoh and his people, who had sorely oppressed the Israelites, drew no tears from any quarter of the universe.

Personification in the Qur'an, it can be seen, is more than a simple figure of speech: it occurs within a certain conceptual framework, an understanding of which is essential to a fuller appreciation of the meaning and purpose of personification in that text.

Metonymy

Several forms of substitution of one thing for something associated with it occur in the Qur'an: cause for effect, effect for cause, and attribute for name:

Cause for Effect. "We [God] shall write down what they have said," says

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Q 3.181. Writing something down facilitates remembrance, and so "to write something down" comes to signify "to remember something and not forget it." Q 58.22 says, "These are the people in whose hearts He [God] has inscribed (*kataba*) faith." "To inscribe faith" in the believers' hearts is "to entrench" it in their hearts, the entrenchment being the effect of the inscription.

Effect for Cause. Q 40.13 reads: "He [God] sends down from the heavens your sustenance (*rizq*)." In fact, it is not *rizq* that is sent down but rain, which produces *rizq* in the form of grain, fruits, and vegetables. Q 7.27 is similar: "We have sent down clothing (*libas*) for you." God sends down rainwater, causing to grow by means of it cotton, from which clothes are made. In Q 40, a "believing man from the people of Pharaoh" (verse 28), addressing Pharaoh and his people, says, in support of Moses' message: "What is the matter that I call you to salvation whereas you call me to hellfire?" (verse 41). Pharaoh and his people are not calling that man to hellfire, but disbelief is the cause, and hellfire, the consequence, and so, to invite someone to disbelief is to invite that person to hellfire. The same type of argument is found in Q 4.10: "Indeed, those who devour the wealth of the orphans wrongfully are only filling up their bellies with hellfire."

Attribute for Name. In c. 570, the Christian governor of Yemen in southern Arabia attacked Mecca. Accompanying his troops were a number of war-trained elephants. In Q 105.1, Abrahah and his troops are called "the people of elephants."[9] In Q 89.10, Pharaoh is called "the one of tent-pegs," an allusion to his army, which installed tents, using pegs, when it encamped (Islahi 9.355). Jonah is called "the one of fish" in Q 21.87 and 67.48.

Philosophically, metonymy calls into question the division of an object, process, or phenomenon into components, and it does so by relating those components to one another either causally or in some other way. It, thus, stresses the integrity of the object, process, or phenomenon, but it does so, paradoxically, by suggesting that that integrity is best underscored through reference to one or another of the components of the thing in question. Brief comments on the examples of metonymy cited above are in order.

In Q 3.181, "to write something down" becomes the cause of remembering something, but in this particular context, remembrance, in turn, becomes a cause of punishment, for to remember somebody's wrong is to hold it against that person and call him or her to account for it. The verse thus means: God will remember the improper things certain people are uttering and will punish them for those utterances. In Q 58.22, the metonymic *kataba* ("to write") gives the connotations of finality and permanence, for, "to put something in writing" is to give it a definitive and authoritative form.

Q 40.13, by substituting *rizq* for rain, invites reflection on, first, the ben-

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eficial effects of rain, and, second, the source of the sustenance, namely, God, one of whose attributes in the Qur'an is *Raziq* (Sustainer; the intensive form *Razzaq* is also used). The metonymy, thus, emphasizes the providential aspect of the otherwise ordinary natural phenomenon of rain, implying that gratitude is due from human beings to God for the *rizq* He has provided them. Likewise, in Q 7.27, the word *libas* alludes to all the processes that lead to the production of clothes, suggesting that the final product, no less than the original cause, rain, constitutes a blessing of God. In light of such verses as Q 7.26, moreover, the use of the word *libas* in Q 7.27 implies approbation of the typical human use of clothes for purposes both of covering nakedness and of adornment. In Q 40.41 and 4.10, the metonymy, by eliminating the temporal gap between a wrong committed in this world and its punishment in the next, stresses the immediacy of the dire consequences of the wrongful act in each case: Pharaoh's call to disbelief is actually a call to hellfire (Q 40.41), and certain people's devouring of orphans' wealth amounts to their consumption of hellfire (Q 4.10).

The designation, in Q 105.1, of Abrahah and his troops as "the people of elephants" highlights the special war strategy used by the invaders. The use of elephants as instruments of war was a novel experience for the awestruck Arabs, to whom the invaders were best remembered as "the people of elephants" (Islahi 9.558). The use of this phrase jogs the Arabs' historical memory and, at the same time, underscores the blessing of the deliverance of the Arabs by God, who, as the rest of the surah explains, routed the mighty army of Abrahah. Q 89.10, by calling Pharaoh "the one of tent-pegs," indicates that Pharaoh had a large standing army, one that resided in pitched tents (Islahi 9.355). Q 21.87 and 67.48 make the ordeal of Jonah and God's deliverance of Jonah from his ordeal the focal point of the prophet's story.

Synecdoche

A part may stand for the whole and vice versa.

Part for Whole. Several Qur'anic verses (2.177; 4.92; 5.89; 9.60; 58.3; 90.13) prescribe the freeing of a "neck"—that is, of a slave—as expiation for a violation of the law, as fulfillment of an obligation, or simply as a good act. The word "face" (*wajh*) is sometimes used in the sense of the whole body or being, as in Q 2.144, which instructs the believers to turn their "faces" toward the Ka'bah while in prayer, or as in Q 28.88, "Everything is going to perish except His face," where "face" stands for the Being of God (see also Q 55.77). In some verses, several major components of the ritual prayer,

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salah, are each termed *salah* (Q 3.43; 17.78; 73.2; 76.26).

Whole for Part. In Q 3.173, "People have gathered to confront you," the general word "people" (*nas*) means not the entirety of humankind but a certain group of people—the opponents of the believers—and in Q 2.13, "Believe, the way people have believed," again, that word stands for a certain group of people, this time for the believers. Q 2.51, citing history, accuses all Israelites of worshipping the calf when only some of them had done so, and soon thereafter in that surah (verse 54), the Israelites are commanded by Moses, "Kill yourselves," whereas only those guilty of calf-worship were to be killed.

In substituting a part for the whole, the speaker suggests that the part is significant enough to stand for the whole, or, which is the same thing, that the part being referred to is the most essential of the components of the whole. The addressees, on their part, find it easier to focus attention on the narrowed-down subject. In substituting the whole for a part, on the other hand, the suggestion is made that the significance of the part in question is fully understood with reference to the whole to which it belongs. In each case of substitution, the speaker attempts to focus attention on what the audience, it is feared, might miss or not pay sufficient attention to—namely, the big picture in the case of substitution of the whole for the part and the essential detail in the case of substitution of the part for the whole. In other words, synecdoche represents, from a psychological standpoint, a kind of compensatory mechanism for ensuring a balanced or well-rounded view of the matter in question. We will review briefly the above-cited examples of synecdoche.

The command to free a neck (Q 2.177 and elsewhere) draws a picture—that of a slave under a yoke or with chains around his neck—and the graphic image makes an urgent appeal to the addressees to relieve the helpless slave of the intense pain felt by him in one of the most sensitive and vulnerable parts of his body—in the neck. Similarly, the face is the most distinctive part of the body for purposes of identification. The command to the believers to turn their faces toward the Ka'bah while performing the prayer (Q 2.14) is meant, on the one hand, to signify that the believers must turn toward the center of their spiritual existence with total commitment, and, on the other hand, to emphasize the distinctiveness of the emergent Muslim community. In Arabic, the plural of "face"—*wujuh*—is sometimes used in the sense of "distinguished persons, notables." Accordingly, when the Qur'an says that everything will perish except the face of God (Q 28.88 and 55.77), it makes reference to divine majesty. The verses in which individual constituents of *salah*—standing (Q 73.2), bowing (Q 3.43), prostration (Q 76.26), and Qur'an recitation (Q 17.78)—are isolated and each called *salah* emphasize

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the importance of each individual element of *salah*, indicating that the *salah* will be defective or incomplete without it.

Q 3.173 and 2.13 are self-explanatory. Q 2.51, which blames the entire Israelite community for worshipping the calf, underscores Israel's collective responsibility for the act, and Q 2.54, which commands the Israelites to "kill yourselves," is meant to teach the Israelites the painful lesson that, even though, in practice, they will be killing only those directly responsible for the calf-worship, they should realize that a stricter, and justified, punishment for such a great sin would have been death for the entire community.

Syllepsis and Zeugma

In *syllepsis*, a word applies to two terms in two different senses; in *zeugma*, a word applies to two terms, though it properly goes only with one, with the word that would go with the other term taken as understood.[10] Both syllepsis and zeugma aim at sharpening awareness of a situation, and both (zeugma more so than syllepsis) achieve their effect by, first, creating a sudden hiatus in the flow of speech or suddenly disrupting the audience's thought process, and, then, releasing that flow or resuming that thought process by bridging the two parts of the discourse, one preceding the hiatus or the disruption and the other following it. The result is production of certain connotations which add to the power of the discourse.

In Q 10.71, an example of syllepsis, Noah tells his people that he has put his faith in God and is not afraid of their stratagems, saying: *ajmi'u amrakum wa shuraka'akum*, which means literally: "Gather your resolve and your associates" (that is, those whom you associate with God). Here, the verb "gather," which governs two objects, has a literal meaning when applied to "associates," but a metaphorical meaning when applied to "resolve." The use of the verb with the two objects connotes disdain, with Noah implying, as he addresses his opponents: Those whom you associate with God enjoy no better status than the silly resolve you have made, so that (we can imagine Noah speaking like a rhetorician) they do not deserve the honor of being referred to by means of a separate verb and can be lumped together with the object, "resolve," governed by the verb "gather." A different set of connotations is present in Q 39.23, which says that, when the Qur'an is revealed, "their [God-fearing people's] skins and hearts incline to the remembrance of God." In this verse, the act of inclining is attributed literally to skins and metaphorically to hearts. One might say that "skins" represents the outward or physical aspect of the act of "inclining" toward the remembrance of God, whereas "hearts" represents the inner or spiritual aspect of the same

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act. The use of a single verb for the two objects signifies a complete concord between the God-fearing people's internal feelings and their external action, between their state of mind and their observable behavior.

Q 59.9 is a good example of zeugma. The verse speaks of those who have *tabawwa'u d-dara wa l-imana*. The verb *tabawwa'a* means "to take up residence," and the phrase would translate literally: "[Those who] took up residence in homes and in faith." The verb obviously goes with "homes" only, and so one will have to take as understood a verb that would go with "faith," for example "strengthen" (in Arabic, some verb like *ahkama*) (Islahi 8.294-95). The use of *tabawwa'a* in the verse makes the powerful suggestion that the people in question not only are residing in their homes, but also are residing in—that is, are entrenched in—their faith, that, in their minds, they see no difference between their physical home and their spiritual home.

Concluding Note

The figures of speech are commonly divided into two categories: devices that enhance meaning through an extraordinary arrangement of words (called schemes) and devices that do so through employment of words in extraordinary senses (called tropes) (Lanham 116). In view of this distinction, we can term the first five figures of speech examined in this paper—asyndeton, polysyndeton, parallelism, chiasmus, and envelope—schemes and the last five figures of speech—personification, metonymy, synecdoche, syllepsis, and zeugma—tropes. The division, however, is of only academic importance. What really matters is the purpose for which the figures of speech are used and the effect they seek to achieve. I have tried to suggest that the Qur'anic use of figures of speech is significant, and that the present paper can be taken as an indicator of some of the potential that the language of the Qur'an holds as an object of study.[11]

In this study of a segment of the Qur'anic language, I have tried to use analytical categories taken from the discipline of rhetoric dominant in Western literary scholarship—namely, Greco-Latin rhetoric. There are, to be sure, a number of meeting points between this rhetoric and Arabic rhetoric, but the two disciplines also differ from each other in orientation, perspective, and structure. A comparative study in depth of the two models is certainly called for.

The Qur'anic use of figurative devices can be compared with their use in pre-Islamic literature—especially, pre-Islamic poetry. A principal way in which Qur'anic Arabic differs from pre-Islamic Arabic is that the former's use of literary devices contributes directly and effectively to the presentation

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of a set of well-defined and well-integrated religious and moral themes and ideas. In this respect, the Qur'anic figures of speech will be found to have much in common with the Biblical figures of speech. And that, of course, constitutes yet another area of study.

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NOTES

1. For a brief overview of the issue of the Qur'an's inimitability, see Martin. For relatively more detailed treatments, see Abdul Aleem, Himsi, and Bouman. Mention must be made of the exceptionally fine, compact paper by Boullata.

2. Three major treatments of the issue of inimitability are the classical Baqillani and Jurjani, and the modern Rafi'i.

3. The approach taken by Ibn al-Qayyim in his otherwise highly informative and fairly comprehensive work is no different than that of Zarkashi and Suyuti.

4. I am most grateful to Professor James P. Dougherty and two anonymous reviewers for the valuable comments and suggestions they gave to improve this paper.

5. In a relatively modern example—a macabre one—Alphonse de Lamartine makes an effective use of asyndeton to describe the guillotine execution of Louis XVI: "La planche chavira, la hache glissa, la tête tomba" (vol. 3, p. 68).

6. The translation of the Qur'anic material cited is my own. I should point out that, in discussing the individual Qur'anic verses cited in this paper, I have not felt it necessary to document each and every point made. The author on whom I have relied the most for many of the explanations of verses given in the paper is Islahi, author of a multivolume Urdu commentary on the Qur'an, listed in the bibliography.

7. For other significations of the Qur'anic phrase *aziz hakim*, see Mir, "Qur'an as Literature" 56-57.

8. In the case of the Qur'an, which is often regarded as a discourse lacking coherence, envelope comes to have especial importance since it suggests aspects of coherence in the text.

9. The word *fil*, "elephant," occurring in the Arabic original is singular, but it may be construed as a plural, especially since the Qur'anic phrase in which it occurs is *ashab al-fil* (*ashab*, "people," being plural) and not *sahib al-fil* (*sahib*, "man," being singular). According to several reports, furthermore, Abrahah's army included a group of elephants (Islahi 9.558). According to Farahi, the word *fil* is singular, but since the phrase in which it occurs is in construct state (*idafah*) and the first, or annexed, term (*mudaf*) of the construction is plural, the word is generic in meaning and is, effectively, a plural. Farahi adds: "The word may be construed as a singular or as a plural, and there are reports supporting each construal, but the plural meaning is the more likely one, and God knows best" (1).

10. In some works, the definitions of syllepsis and zeugma are switched, as in Lanham,

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where syllepsis is defined as "One verb lacking congruence with at least one subject that it governs" and zeugma, as "One verb governs several congruent words or clauses, each in a different way" (105). For the definitions given in this paper, see Fowler, "syllepsis."

11. For a general treatment of the language of the Qur'an, see Mir, "Language."

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